



# Prairie Update

A publication of the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority Volume 38 Winter 2009

## A Little Bird Receives Big Help at Muskiki Lake

When looking for examples of how agricultural producers are helping to protect the natural environment around them, Muskiki Lake is a good place to start.

Located northeast of Saskatoon, the shores of this alkali lake provide habitat for the Piping Plover, a species at risk. However, this habitat can be negatively affected by agricultural activities.

"A major threat to the Piping Plover habitat at Muskiki Lake is cattle which have access to the beach during the nesting season," said Carman Wilcox, an Agri-Environmental Technologist with the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority. "The Plover chicks could fall into depressions made by the hooves of livestock, which they are unable to get out of."

The plight of these little birds caught the attention of two local producers and neighbors: Warren Perozuk and David Viczko.

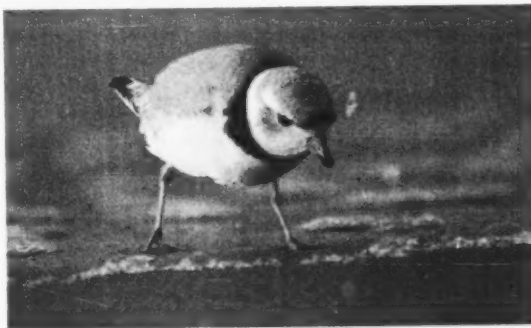
"In 2008, I learned that my pastures were ideal areas for the Plover to build their nests and I wanted to do my part to help protect them," said Perozuk, a grain and cattle producer who lives on the southwest side of Muskiki Lake.

Viczko, whose land also sits adjacent to Plover nesting areas, saw the same need to get involved. "Muskiki Lake is a great place to view migrating birds; not just the Plover, but Whooping Cranes as well. I knew of projects that could really make a difference in preserving their habitat, and Carman had information on some great funding opportunities to make them happen."

Through the Government of Canada's Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk and with assistance from the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority, Viczko and Perozuk are both implementing projects that will help protect the birds' habitat.

Currently, Perozuk grazes cattle on a 480 acre pasture beside Muskiki Lake, which includes the shoreline. Perozuk will construct 4 kilometres of fencing along the shoreline which will restrict cattle from accessing approximately 320 acres

of native prairie grassland while protecting the Piping Plover habitat during their nesting period. As well, additional fencing will further divide the 480 acres, creating three paddocks which will allow Perozuk to improve his cattle management system by rotationally grazing the area without using the native grassland and shoreline until the nesting season is over.



A quarter-mile-long corridor from his pasture to an artesian well was also designed, thus eliminating the need for a pumping system and for the cattle to access the shoreline. Perozuk will also convert 60 acres of marginal grain land to perennial forage in order to provide excellent wildlife habitat and more grazing for his cattle while reducing the potential for water erosion.

Viczko, meanwhile, plans to restrict his cattle from accessing a full mile of shoreline and defer grazing on approximately 140 acres of native prairie grassland. In addition to the development of an alternative water source and fencing, the project also involves the planting and fencing of a 160 acre tame pasture, which will provide excellent grazing in the spring while keeping the cattle away from the shoreline until the end of the nesting season.

"Saskatchewan producers are seeing the benefits of participating in this program," said Wilcox. "The Habitat Stewardship Program concentrates specifically on species at risk and funding is only released for projects that include management practices or infrastructure designs that benefit the desired species. David and Warren have designed systems that streamline their farming operations, thus making them easier to manage, and also more environmentally sustainable."

"I would like to thank Carman Wilcox for his efforts in gathering information for both David and myself, dealing with a few concerns that emerged along the way, and helping the process move forward," said Perozuk.

*Funding for these projects was provided by the Government of Canada's Habitat Stewardship Program.*

# What's New?

**Take a look at some of the new projects and programs available from the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority and our partner agencies . . .**

## **Funding for Source Water Protection**

During a ceremony held on December 12th in North Battleford, the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority and the North Saskatchewan River Basin Council signed a funding agreement to begin the implementation of the North Saskatchewan River Watershed Source Water Protection Plan.

Under the agreement, the Authority provided \$45,000 to the Council to support the salary, office and travel expenses associated with hiring a local coordinator to oversee implementation of the source water protection plan. The plan, which was developed over a period of more than four years by residents of the watershed, contains 145 key actions aimed at keeping the area's water safe and in good supply.

"We're eager to get to work turning this plan into real, measurable action. To do that, we will need the continued commitment from every group that helped develop the plan," North Saskatchewan River Basin Council chair Murray Ball said.

Copies of the North Saskatchewan River Watershed Source Water Protection Plan are available at [www.swa.ca](http://www.swa.ca). For more information, please contact Katherine Finn, Project Coordinator for the North Saskatchewan River Basin Council, at (306) 446-4055 or e-mail [kfinn@sasktel.net](mailto:kfinn@sasktel.net).



**John Kindrachuk, Vice Chair, North Saskatchewan River Basin Council (left) accepts a cheque from Wayne Dybvig, Vice President of Operations, Saskatchewan Watershed Authority.**

*Photo courtesy of Doug Collie, The Battlefords Daily News*

## **National Sustainable Grazing Mentorship Program**

### ***What is a Grazing Mentor?***

A mentor is a respected producer peer with extensive grazing management experience and knowledge. He/she can suggest grazing management options to help you improve your profits, your forage productivity and your land and water resources.

### ***How does the program work?***

A mentor will visit your farm or ranch to assess your grazing resources and discuss your opportunities and challenges. The mentor may make suggestions for grazing system design or modification and provide helpful tips for implementation. Mentors will provide peer support and continued communication to aid in decision making and implementation of grazing management practices. A mentor will be available for approximately 16 hours of mentoring with an individual farm/ranch operation.

### ***Is there a cost?***

As a farm/ranch operation, you pay \$100 to be connected with a mentor and the program tops up the rest to cover the mentor's time and travel expenses (to a budget maximum).

### ***How can I get involved?***

Simply contact Leanne Thompson, the Saskatchewan Forage Council's Grazing Mentorship Program Coordinator, at (306) 454-2777 or visit [www.saskforage.ca](http://www.saskforage.ca) for more details.

## Native Prairie Appreciation Day at Saskatchewan Burrowing Owl Interpretive Centre

A native prairie appreciation day was held this fall at the Saskatchewan Burrowing Owl Interpretive Centre. Visitors learned how to collect their own native prairie seeds and went home with a free starter mix and instructions to starting their own native prairie garden.

The appreciation day was hosted at a plot of restored native prairie which the Saskatchewan Burrowing Owl Interpretive Centre planted two years ago. Today the plot is flourishing with over 30 different species of native prairie plants.

Native prairie plants typically grow well in soil with low fertility, need little watering because they are adapted to living in dry prairie conditions, and most are either perennial or self-seeding. "We wanted to show people how easy and rewarding it is to plant native prairie around their own home," says Janet Ng, Director of the Centre.

In partnership with the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority, SaskPower, and the Native Plant Society of Saskatchewan, the Saskatchewan Burrowing Owl Interpretive Centre established the garden to teach people about the value of native prairie, the biodiversity of native prairie plants, and how everything from our watershed to wildlife is dependent on native prairie. The native plant seeds used to plant the garden came from the Regina Plains Native Prairie Nursery.

The Saskatchewan Burrowing Owl Interpretive Centre is located on the Moose Jaw Exhibition Grounds. In addition to the native garden, there is an interpretive centre to explore and 13 captive Burrowing Owls to meet.



Native prairie provides crucial habitat for several species at risk. The Burrowing Owl, for example, is known to nest and forage on parcels of native prairie.



A group of native prairie lovers gathers at the Saskatchewan Burrowing Owl Interpretive Centre

## Friends of Wascana Marsh Receive Greenwing Conservation Award

On October 29th, His Honour the Honourable Dr. Gordon L. Barnhart, Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan, presented the Friends of Wascana Marsh with the Lieutenant Governor's Greenwing Conservation Award in recognition of the group's continual work in wetland conservation and education.

"Being selected for this award is a truly humbling experience," said Jan Kindred, who accepted the award on behalf of the Friends of Wascana Marsh. "We are honoured to be this year's recipient, and are very proud of our Wascana Centre, as it provides such a great place to help residents learn about waterfowl, nature and the value of wetlands."

The award, which is sponsored by Ducks Unlimited Canada, recognizes individuals or groups who have demonstrated leadership in a project or activity that has contributed significantly to the public awareness of the values of wetland ecosystems and their benefits to waterfowl, wildlife and people.

Fellow nominees for the award included the Saskatchewan Forestry Association and the South East Upper Souris River Agri-Environmental Group Plan.

"Through educational initiatives such as Wings Over Wascana Nature Festival, we can help youth learn about the natural world. This knowledge is very important to the future health of our environment," said Kindred.

Jan Kindred of the Friends of Wascana Marsh accepts the Greenwing Conservation Award from His Honour the Honourable Dr. Gordon L. Barnhart, Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan.

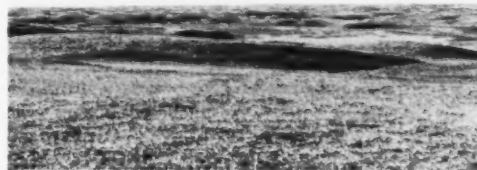


# Upper Souris

This fall, Watershed Advisory Committee members in the Upper Souris River Watershed got to know their watershed a little better through two tours of the area. The Upper Souris is one of the newest watersheds involved in watershed and aquifer planning through the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority.

On October 22nd and 23rd, two tours throughout the Weyburn and Estevan areas helped broaden the understanding of the watershed's condition and challenges, and also allowed Committee members from the three planning areas - Moose Mountain, Tatagwa/Long Creek, and CanAm - to introduce themselves to each other.

Each stop on the tour was chosen to highlight some of the key water use and management issues within the watershed, such as municipal drinking water and waste water treatment, oil and gas development, riparian area management, intensive livestock operations, fish habitat protection, and recreational uses. The members also received detailed information about the development and operation of the Boundary, Rafferty and Alameda Dams.



Emile Carles who ranches near Radville, discussed stewardship programs he's implemented on his farm.



Nickle Lake Regional Park is a recreational spot just southeast of Weyburn. The dam and reservoir were built in the 1950's to provide a water supply for the City of Weyburn.



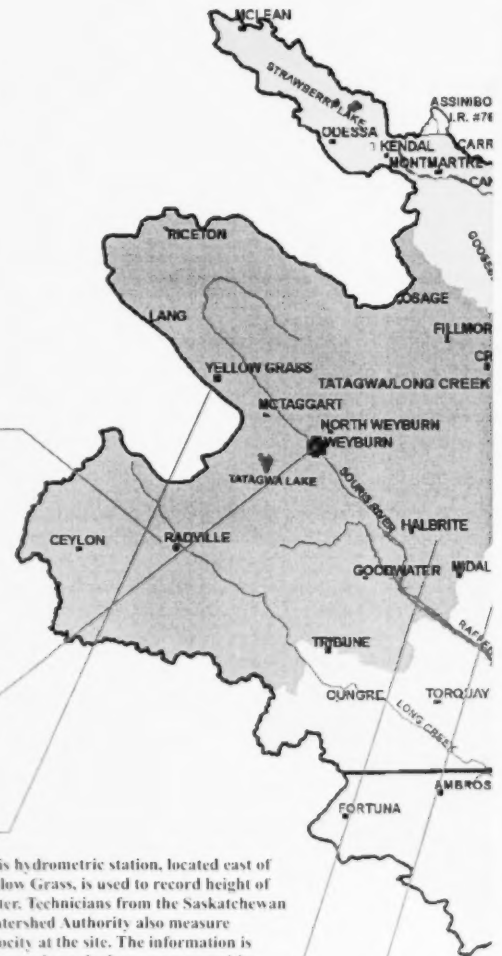
This hydrometric station, located east of Yellow Grass, is used to record height of water. Technicians from the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority also measure velocity at the site. The information is then used to calculate water quantities.



Moose Mountain Reservoir made a perfect picnic stop on the tour. The Saskatchewan Watershed Authority owns and operates the Moose Mountain Dam, which was originally built in 1937.



Mainprize Regional Park, situated on Rafferty Reservoir, is a popular destination for cottagers, fishers and outdoor enthusiasts.





# Watershed



The town of Arcola developed their own source water protection plan. Town foreman Alan Noble showed tour participants the source of the town's raw water.

Park Manager Gordon Locke described the low lake levels and park management of the popular Moose Mountain Provincial Park.



The Alameda Reservoir provides a stable water supply and flood protection for Saskatchewan and North Dakota residents. Tour participants received a guided tour of the Low Level Outlet Building from Reynold Belitski of the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority.



The Shand Greenhouse distributes about half a million trees and shrubs each year for conservation projects. The Shand Power Station uses 60 percent of the water available in the Rafferty Reservoir.

Mitigation lands were developed as compensation for lost wildlife habitat as a result of the construction of the dams.



The Boundary Dam Power Station is the biggest power station among three baseload thermal stations. The Boundary Dam Reservoir was constructed in 1957 to provide cooling water for the station. The reservoir is home to large mouth bass.



The Rafferty Dam was developed in conjunction with Alameda Dam in 1995 and both are owned and operated by the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority. Operation of the project is guided by an international treaty between Canada and the United States. This photo shows the downstream channel of the Souris River, with the City of Estevan and Shand Power Station in the background.

# Assiniboine Watershed Stewardship Association Pilots Innovative Wetland Restoration Program

What is a fair price to pay someone to restore a drained wetland?

While there have been plenty of programs over the years offering landowners compensation for restoring drained wetlands, that question has always been a sticking point. How much should a landowner be paid to bring a wetland back to its natural state, something that provides numerous environmental benefits but takes valuable cropland out of production?

Most often, previous wetland restoration programs offered a pre-determined compensation package, and the landowners could essentially take it or leave it. But now, an innovative new program from the Assiniboine Watershed Stewardship Association is letting landowners set their price by entering what is known as a reverse auction.

Through the program, landowners with property within the Assiniboine River Watershed were asked to submit "bids," stating the number of wetland acres they were willing to restore and specifying the price per acre they would be willing to accept to do so.

"Rather than dictating to people what we're willing to pay them to restore wetlands, this approach lets the landowner tell us what they want to be paid. It's their property, and this way they can make us an offer at whatever price they feel gives them fair value," says Aron Hershmillier, Manager of the Assiniboine Watershed Stewardship Association.

The program was launched this past October, and bids have been coming in throughout the last few months. Landowners

were asked to submit bids based on signing either a 12-year or a permanent conservation agreement on the lands to be restored. As of early January, the Association had received a total of 104 bids from landowners throughout the 17,300 km<sup>2</sup> watershed.

The successful bids will be chosen by the Association based on the bid combined with a calculation of the environmental benefits of restoring those wetlands.

Once chosen, a technician will contact the selected landowners to survey the wetland area that will be restored and determine the total amount to be paid. The Association will also arrange and pay for all contract work that is required to complete the restoration.

The program is the first reverse auction targeting wetland restoration to be held in Canada. Ducks Unlimited Canada and the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority partnered with the Association to make the program possible.

According to Tom Harrison, Director of Projects and Partnerships with the Authority, the main goal of this pilot program is to restore numerous wetlands within the watershed. It will also provide the partners with useful information on what local landowners believe is a fair price for these types of projects.

More information on the reverse auction is available on the Association's website, [www.assiniboinewatershed.com](http://www.assiniboinewatershed.com).

## *What are wetlands, and why restore them?*

Wetlands are areas that hold surface water, either temporarily or permanently. Wetlands and the grasslands around them provide a number of beneficial functions, such as reducing the effects of flooding, erosion and sedimentation, recharging ground water, filtering nutrients, pesticides and pathogens from the water, maintaining shorelines, and providing important wildlife habitat.

Saskatchewan is home to an abundance of wetlands. Air surveys indicate that Saskatchewan supports almost the same number of prairie wetlands as Alberta, Manitoba, Montana and North and South Dakota combined. However, in order to maximize the number of acres available for crop production, many landowners have, over the past several decades, chosen to drain the water from hundreds of the province's wetlands. It has been estimated that 70 per cent of southern-prairie wetlands have been drained or destroyed.

Draining a wetland reduces its ability to carry out their beneficial functions. By restoring wetlands, landowners stand to reduce the impacts of droughts and floods, improve the quantity and quality of ground and surface water, ensure a dependable source of forage (particularly in drought years), and reduce soil erosion.



*Photo courtesy Ducks Unlimited Canada*

# Fairlight Grazing Project

By Angela Bethune

A research farm in southeast Saskatchewan is using a demonstration project to showcase grazing techniques and the use of non-bloating legumes and native grass.

South East Research Farm manager Garth Johnston says the Fairlight Grazing Project demonstrates the impact of overgrazing on stand production and pasture production. A herd of 30 cow-calf pairs and a bull are being used for the demonstration. The area has been fenced into two 30-acre paddocks, and one 60-acre paddock.

Johnston describes the site. "Half the site is grazed hard and half is grazed lightly to show the long-term impacts of grazing techniques. There are four paddocks on the east side and each is about 12 to 15 acres. The two farthest east are the heaviest grazed. Our intention for the overgrazed side would be four times a summer, with the initial grazing and final grazing on the overgrazed side. The regular grazed side gets half as much, with total grazing between 90 to 120 days." The side-by-side comparison shows how forage productivity declines over the long-term with overstocking.

The west side just looks like an average alfalfa field, according to Johnston. "It's a good chunk of farmland. In 2007 and 2008 we took forages off it, and then we fall grazed it in 2008. So, this past year was our second year of grazing and third year of planting into forages."

But grazing isn't the only demonstration. The project also uses a solar watering system and solar fencing. The remote watering system helps promote healthy riparian areas by keeping the cattle away from the shoreline.

"We're also showing the use of different legumes and native grasses," Johnston says. There are three different blends of legumes being used. Each of the three seed mixes has a heavily and moderately grazed portion.

One blend is alfalfa with a mixture of native grasses. "The native grass isn't as aggressive as the alfalfa. We seeded Green Needle Grass, Western Wheat Grass, Northern Wheat Grass and Little Bluestem. We want to take a look at how native grass can be grazed, but we're a long way from getting those species established," says Johnston.

The second blend is Sainfoin, an alternative legume to alfalfa, mixed with Meadow Brome and AC Grazeland alfalfa. "Sainfoin is a low-bloat alfalfa, and it's coming good. That gives producers more peace of mind, and they can worry less about bloat. It has a different, longer-lasting life cycle."

The third blend is Cicer milkvetch, also a low-bloat alfalfa, mixed with Meadow Brome and AC Grazeland. "The Cicer milkvetch is an alternative legume that's harder to establish, and it comes much slower than alfalfa."

"Alternative legumes are longer lasting because they take longer to establish. The advantage with alfalfa in your blend is the first couple years it grows like crazy and you end up with way more alfalfa than grass so you have to be careful how you graze it. That stand will then evolve with less alfalfa, blend along, and become more of a grazing stand. With the alternatives, the grass will grow first and you'll be able to graze them easier with less concern with bloat, and get more of a hay cut. This should give you a few more years with a more consistent grazing stand," says Johnston.



The project is well-marked by signage describing the project's demonstration points.

The project is a well-known demonstration site near Fairlight. "It's in a familiar location, right on the highway, so it gets lots of public attention and awareness in the surrounding communities." Partnering with the farm is the District Agriculture Development and Diversification (ADD) Board #5, the owners of the land.

The South East Research Farm Inc. near Redvers is a non-profit research institute, part of a research farm management network called Agriculture-Applied Research Management (Agri-ARM). The program is a province-wide network of eight regional applied research and demonstration sites. Each location has an affiliated producer group that sets the research priorities for the site, focusing on increasing value from crops and enhancing production efficiency and environmental stewardship.

The demonstration project is supported by District ADD Board #5, the Canada-Saskatchewan Farm Stewardship Program, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Husky Oil, SolarWest, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture, the Canadian Cattlemen's Association under the national Greenhouse Gas Mitigation Program for Canadian Agriculture, and the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority.

## Hello Voluntary Stewards!

Thank you for taking the time to read the first edition of the *Prairie Update* for 2009! As always, we hope you have enjoyed the articles included in this newsletter, and we welcome any comments you have. Of course, our sincere thanks go to those who agreed to share their stories with us in these pages.

We particularly hope you enjoyed our article on the wetland restoration project underway in the Assiniboine River Watershed. This innovative program asks landowners what price per acre they'd be willing to accept to restore wetland acres. It's a new approach to the common stewardship activity of restoring these vital parts of our landscape.

You can find more information on the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority's Prairie Stewardship Program in back issues of this newsletter. These issues, as well as interactive maps featuring other stewardship project demonstration sites, can be viewed on our website at [www.swa.ca](http://www.swa.ca).

*Angela Bethune*  
*Paul Chomos*  
*Ryan Lorge*

## Share Your Ideas!

If you have comments or ideas about this newsletter, please contact:

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For information about the Prairie Stewardship Program please contact:

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*SaskPower - Shand Greenhouse*  
*Wildlife Habitat Canada*  
*Wyoming Game and Fish Department*

## Coming Events

For more information on stewardship events near you, please contact the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority office nearest you:

<b>North Battleford</b>	Jeremy Brown	446-7460
<b>Regina</b>	Etienne Soulodre	787-0661
<b>Swift Current</b>	Krista Connick	778-8280
	Bob Springer	778-8301
	JeanAnne Prysliak	778-8424
<b>Weyburn</b>	Stacey Gulka	848-2354
<b>Yorkton</b>	Jason Puckett	786-5845
	Lyndon Hicks	786-1496